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ABSTRACT

This newsletter describes the 6-year Supporting Diversity in Schools (SDS) project that seeks to create school environments free of racial prejudice and privilege. It briefly describes the program's working themes: (1) giving a voice to people who have traditionally been silent in the shaping of classroom practices; (2) developing pride in children and families concerning their heritage; (3) helping participants in the SDS to learn to work together; and (4) creating partnerships that bring together school staff, parents, community organization staff and board members, and SDS personnel to make collaborative decisions regarding activities, budgets, evaluation, and staffing. The report examines each area of SDS's goals and focuses including the school environment, the professional effectiveness of the school staff in teaching students of color, the use of schools and community organizations in developing lasting partnerships to support effective school environments for students of color, and the involvement of families of color in shaping their children's schools. (GLR)

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Program Summary
Fall 1993

SDS
Supporting Diversity in Schools

SDS Report:

Walking the talk of racial equity

Inaugurated in August 1989, Supporting Diversity in Schools (SDS) is a bold six-year program in Saint Paul, Minnesota that seeks to create school environments free of racial prejudice and privilege. SDS walks the talk of multiculturalism and inclusiveness by involving parents, teachers, administrators and community members from diverse backgrounds in the creation and support of school-community partnerships. SDS dares to bring together America — to bring to one table the diverse peoples who face the challenges of racial equity in our changing society.

As SDS finishes its fourth year, several working themes have begun to emerge.

Giving Voice:

SDS is giving voice to people who have traditionally been silent in the shaping of classroom practices. Parents whose self confidence or cultural differences previously kept them in the background, now are helping to shape the curriculum, instructional content and operation of their children's schools.

Making Culture Visible in Positive Ways:

Children and families who previously were reluctant to identify their racial/cultural heritage, now are speaking up with pride. Teachers and other school staff who knew little about people different from themselves are beginning to see new strengths in the children they teach.

Diverse People Working Together:

Participants in SDS are learning to work together across barriers of race, culture, education, and class that traditionally separate people from one another. They're becoming confident of their ability to talk and act together on the tasks of creating racially equitable schools; they're excited by the positive power of decisions that result from collaboration.

PARTNERSHIPS

On the front lines of this unprecedented effort are five school-community partnerships. Each partnership brings together school staff, parents, community organization staff or board members, and the staff of SDS to make collaborative decisions regarding activities, budgets, evaluation, and staffing. The SDS Advisory Committee reviews annual proposals from each partnership and awards yearly contracts of up to $25,000 to those that meet program criteria. Current partnerships include:

Benjamin/League Advocating Diversity and Equity (BLADE):

Benjamin E. Mays Elementary School
The St. Paul Urban League

De Colores:

Neighborhood House
St. Matthew's Elementary School
St. Matthew's Child Care

Hmong Pride Connection:

Hmong American Partnership
Mississippi Elementary School

Making A Difference Is Our Business:

Family Service of Greater St. Paul
Maxfield Elementary School

On Eagles Wings:

St. Paul American Indians in Unity
Jackson Elementary School

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SDS GOALS

The pillars of SDS are its four goals that focus on school environments, professional effectiveness, partnerships and family involvement.

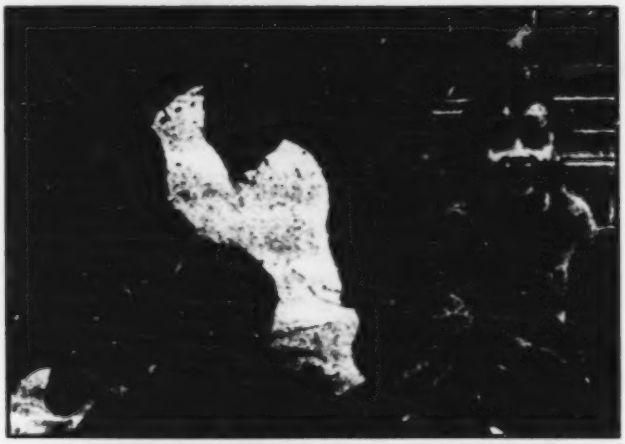
School environments will be free of cultural and racial prejudice and privilege.

Drop out rates are high; achievement scores are low. While it is true that many factors contribute to these grim realities for students of color, no amount of hard work by children, families, or communities will ever achieve educational equity without equally hard work by educators to change school environments.

Each SDS school-community partnership determines how best to address this goal in its own setting. Parents and teachers in On Eagles Wings have worked side by side to critique Jackson School's library books and select new materials that are free of racial stereotypes. In addition, community members make cultural presentations so that all children begin to see the values and cultural practices of Indian people reflected in the life of their classrooms.

Parents, community people and school staff in Making a Difference have developed a Social Responsibility curriculum. Designed for children in kindergarten through third grade, it teaches children about issues of prejudice and privilege and about conflict mediation as a tool for building healthy relationships. Making a Difference also has a unique program for bringing parents and community members into classrooms. They serve as advocates to encourage student success and help teachers of all races learn how to address issues of prejudice across cultural lines.

Other partnerships are working to create culturally-inclusive environments by developing a cultural resource center, introducing a variety of artistic traditions into classrooms, and encouraging discussions around issues of white privilege and racism.



Children at Maxfield School and Carlton Wright, staff member from Family Service of Greater St. Paul, try out activities from the curriculum on Social Responsibility.

School staff will increase its professional effectiveness in teaching students of color.

Increased racial diversity in schools puts new demands on staff. All school staff who come into contact with children and their families need to understand how racial prejudice and white privilege affect children's abilities to learn. They need to know about styles of teaching-and-learning and about traditional ways of communication in cultures different from their own.

Participants in De Colores seek to accomplish this task through a Cultural Focus Committee that organizes activities through which staff at Neighborhood House, St. Matthew's School and St. Matthew's Child Care learn about the cultures of people from throughout the Americas. The committee hosted presentations by long-time Chicano/ Latino residents of St. Paul and by relative newcomers to the community. It also helped parents and teachers organize "resource finding missions" to the St. Paul Festival of Nations to identify speakers, curriculum materials, community events and written resources that would help them learn more about their community.

At Mississippi School, the Hmong American Partnership provides important links necessary for Hmong Pride Connection to conduct inservice training activities on Hmong culture. In addition, several Mississippi teachers have worked with Hmong colleagues to select Hmong artifacts to integrate into the curriculum of the school and have learned important elements of Hmong culture through study of the Hmong language.

Community members describe Chicano/Latino culture to staff of Neighborhood House, St. Matthew's School and St. Matthew's Child Care.

Activities by other partnerships include an Adopt-a-Buddy program that encourages informal friendships among people of different races, workshops on racism and diversity, attendance at culturally-specific arts and other community events, participation in workshops on culturally responsive teaching and integrating diverse cultures into the curriculum.

Schools and community organizations will develop lasting partnerships to support effective school environments for students of color.

St. Paul's students of color come from a rich variety of communities that are, in many ways, quite different from those that are home to the 92% of St. Paul's teaching staff that is white. School staff typically have relatively few opportunities to develop collegial relationships with adults from other cultural communities. They have few occasions to work together as equals.

Parents, community people and educators on BLADE's management team discuss ways to collect information about the impact of partnership activities.

Within SDS, each participant is an expert. Teachers know about schools and about curriculum. Parents and community organization staff are experts in the experience of their own cultures and in the effects of preju-

dice. The work of SDS teaches people to value the experience and perspectives that each person brings to the task of helping children succeed in school.

Each SDS partnership has a management team that includes parents, community people and educators. Members of the management team work to overcome differences of race, class, education and professional roles.

They strive to come together as equals — to share the responsibilities of learning from one another in order to identify issues, make policy, plan activities and manage budgets.

Families of color will become more actively involved in shaping their children's schools.

It's not always easy for parents to become involved in their children's schools. Many parents have never seen themselves in this role, and school staff often have had little experience in seeing parents — particularly parents of color — as peers.

Terry Meryhew, Tou Blong Thao and Kathy Erno plan activities that bring Mississippi School staff and Hmong parents in partnership with each other.

Participants in On Eagles Wings are overcoming these barriers in a variety of ways.

Monthly family activity nights provide an opportunity for Indian families to learn elements of their culture to which many have never before been exposed. Parents' increasing pride and confidence are visible in their participation on committees with school staff and in their escalating leadership on the partnership's management team. A part time parent facilitator is key to helping school staff learn of the contributions that parents can make.

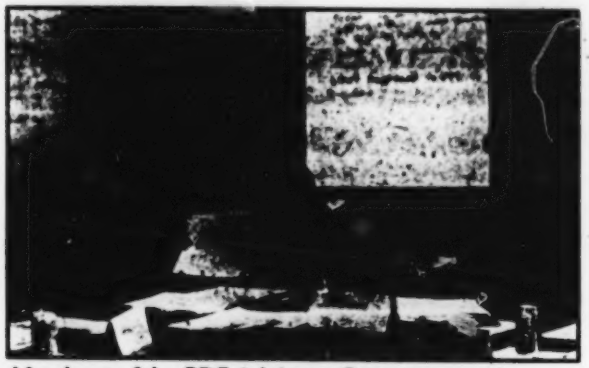
Parents, community members and students of On Eagles Wings make shields for Jackson's World Geography Night.

Participants in BLADE, SDS' newest partnership, have begun to host a series of school-family feasts to help parents learn new ways to become involved in shaping the environment at Benjamin E. Mays School. Parents are key players in BLADE's Adopt a Buddy program that aims to encourage informal multicultural relationships; parents are also assisting in the development of multicultural curriculum for the school.

Other SDS partnerships expand parents' participation in schools by developing their leadership and advocacy skills, providing incentives for participation, overcoming language barriers and serving as a bridge between schools and communities of color.

THE PEOPLE OF SDS

This newsletter is in special recognition of the work of the parents, community people and educators who volunteer their time to serve on the program Advisory Committee; the soul of SDS. This group was created from among the large number of people throughout the St. Paul community who lent their experiences and perspectives to set the course for SDS. Their wisdom, insight and vision formed the conceptual framework from which the program was born, and continue to guide us all down the path to a better world.



Members of the SDS Advisory Committee study partnership proposals and determine contract awards for 1993-94.

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SDS EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

The SDS program not only asks each partnership to strive relentlessly toward the achievement of these ambitious goals, it is also committed to making available educational programming that contributes to the skill development, and grasp of issues necessary to succeed.

During the 1992-93 school year SDS demonstrated this commitment by sponsoring a variety of seminars, workshops and presentations:

— a monthly seminar through Metropolitan State University in which parents, community people and educators studied cross cultural issues in schools.

— intensive workshop activities on Creating Racism-Free Zones in Schools.

— a keynote address on "Culturally-Responsive Teaching" at the St. Paul School's annual Administrators Academy.

— workshops through Hamline University on "Respecting Native American Art as Great World Art".

— seminars on leadership development that focused on issues of diversity.

PUBLICATIONS

Issue Papers

"Language and Race: Barriers to Communicating a Vision" (November 1991)

"Eliminating White Privilege in Schools" (November 1992)

Case Study and Study Guide

"Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer: Issues of Diversity and Partnership"

"The Greatest of All Places to Reside". A right brain analysis of the events of Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer.

Newsletters

Fall 1992. Lead Article: "Diversity in Collaboration — Can We All Get Along?"

Winter 1992-93. (Not available) Lead Article: "Developing White Leadership for Diversity".

Spring 1993. Lead Article: "Culturally Responsive Teaching".

Single copies or small quantities of all publications are mailed free upon request. Printing costs may be charged for large orders.

To order publications or to be placed on the SDS mailing list, please contact Cherie Nelson at (612) 224-5463. Fax: (612) 224-8123.

SDS

Supporting Diversity in Schools
Through Family and Community Involvement

Supporting Diversity in Schools Through Family and Community Involvement (SDS) works with elementary schools and community organizations in Saint Paul, Minnesota to develop a commitment to diversity in education.

If you have information or creative works to contribute to this newsletter, contact John Mentzos at 224-5463.

Supporting Diversity in Schools Through Family and Community Involvement is managed by The Saint Paul Foundation and funded by The Saint Paul Foundation, F.R. Bigelow Foundation, The Bush Foundation, Cowles Media Foundation, General Mills Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Mardag Foundation, The St. Paul Companies, Inc., the Saint Paul Public Schools, and individual donors.

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